

The modern city, the territory and the transportation

The origin of a debate: city, territory and transportation in urban Spain in the 1920's.

The approval at the beginning of the century of the plans for the ensanche (enlargement) of Spain's principal cities—Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid, Sevilla, Valencia—re-defined not only the limits, or perimeters, of these cities, but also signaled to capital investors where to invest and hold onto profits on a medium term basis. The ensanche, far from freeing up new ground and favoring the construction of low income housing, had the opposite effect: the newly available terrain was seen as an investment for big capital looking for high returns on a medium-term basis, and cheap real estate and easily affordable housing were not created. Consequently, those who emigrated to these cities just then starting to be industrialized, came across a more than serious lack

of housing; the only options open to them were either to live in miserable conditions or move outside of the city, creating an unplanned, urban chaos of shacks on the outskirts. In Madrid, for example, we know that in 1904 there were more than 5,000 dwellings on the city's periphery, where almost 160,000 people lived. Perhaps this is why Geddes called the metropolis at the beginning of the century Pandemonium City.

The idea of building on the periphery using the same methods that had been employed in the ensanche, ignored the fact that at the beginning of the century the indiscriminate application of the orthogonal grid—the so-called urbanism of the engineers—had been criticized not only by the defenders of the artistic construction of the city

(Sitte would be defined by Giedion as a poet that "looks to elude the modern industrial dimension with his medieval songs") but also by those who thought it absurd to impose the gridblock on a territory where long straight streets would have to run—in little space—over significant differences in altitude. Others then proposed recuperating medieval design, opening the debate of whether the curved street or straight one was more suitable. These aesthetic arguments in fact hid political motives: the big real estate money favored straight streets because they meant the creation of large new holdings, while small landholders wished for curved streets that accommodated their parcels of land. There were those as well—in their rejection of the metropolis—who were

absolutely not interested in constructing on the outskirts. They opted for abandoning the city and re-establishing urban models that belonged to history: to understanding the metropolis as a "tomb of the proletariat". For them the solution was to return to the community where the values of soul and culture opposed the spirit of the parvenu, to the city understood as the ephemeral, the fashionable, as opposed to what up to then had been eternal values. Let us also not forget Tönnies and Schaeffler, among the Spanish followers of Donoso Cortés and Balmes, who—like the Gironian Bishop Torras i Bages—proposed abandoning industrial Barcelona and moving to small rural centers, conceived in medieval terms, and

forming there a new idea of community. But the idea failed, as all the dreams that favor irreality over reality do. Nonetheless, this same bourgeoisie did not hesitate in proposing the creation in the *ensanche* of small segregated cities, closed and defined as much by design as by their regionalist architecture. An example of these were the urbanized parks of Madrid, the arrangement of Sarrià or Pedrables proposed in Barcelona, the villas built in el Sardinero, or the construction of Algorta as a redoubt of a class that was looking for its own urban space. Baumeister once noted how modern urbanism had to take into account three conditions: the primacy of traffic in planning; the will to concentrate urban planning in the principal arteries; flexibility in planning new urban centers, adjusting them to the topography of the terrain; and the city understood as a natural phenomenon that could grow indefinitely. Looking to order these conditions, some suggested the need to have a declaration of principles (a joint plan to deal with the problems of traffic, zoning, placement and urban characteristics of public buildings and public spaces) while others saw that construction on the outskirts would only come about by accepting the main street as a directional axis, an elemental generator of the urban fabric. If the labor of the urbanist was to define strategies and establish ordinances, with a view to reducing and fighting speculation, the option of the hygienists was to take the city beyond the limits of the *ensanche*, looking for inexpensive terrain to build affordable and sanitary housing. On this basis –how and where to build the necessary worker housing– the

first plans were drawn up for the city's outskirts. The debate about urban planning in Spanish cities at the end of the last century took on a special character, marked by the fact that construction on the periphery was discussed at a time when the *ensanche* was still undeveloped land. Faced with the construction of high density blocks in the *ensanche* –dwellings for “white collar workers” of the 1920's– there were those who proposed the construction of garden cities on the outskirts for “blue collar workers.” There were also companies that, on the contrary, built garden cities for their workers far from the actual city, communities that were in the immediate vicinity of the factories, and which followed the German example. Simultaneously, Soria built his Ciudad Lineal, demonstrating that it was possible not only to create new real estate, but also that it was possible to assume the responsibilities of construction and management, a fact as novel and surprising as would be the construction of a private city. Each of the above mentioned options had its defenders and its detractors. But parallel to the debate over what form the city should take and the possible solutions to the problem of hygienic living, was the fact that construction of the periphery went on unplanned. Because of this, and because of the enormous number of proposals made about how to clarify the relation between the capital city and the peripheral centers, a number of people began to theorize about how best to plan the terrain on the immediacies of the city. Influenced as much by the English studies of Unwin and Abercrombie as by the ideas

published by Mottoli about the German concept of the Großstadt, their intentions were not to outline a plan for the outskirts, as much as to order and design on a much larger scale, the territory near the large cities. In this way they initiated the debate not only about the annexation of already existing suburban centers, but also put forth the idea of regional planning. The administrative debate over the desirability of either annexing or establishing communities (the first would mean that the municipal capital assumed responsibility for unfinished public work projects, receiving minimal revenue in compensation) was cause for a double reflection. Firstly, it was debated whether the new residential centers should be completely restructured, converted as such into satellite cities with a specific function. To accept such a plan meant to define which of these peripheral centers were worth annexing and which lacked any interest. Secondly, there was at the time the proposal of creating a railway line that would join up the annexed centers with one another, establishing in this way a new territorial arrangement. The idea of annexing nearby centers, along with the desire to establish a city-circling railway system, characterised the desire to create a territorial plan in Spain in the 1920's. Until recently, studies of Spanish urbanism in the 1920's and 1930's were always made on a local basis, without contrasting, for example, the Barcelona phenomenon with the urban reality of Bilbao, Sevilla or Valencia at the time. Too often the trees were mistaken for the woods, and a study of specific, concrete examples

obstructed the possibility of seeing what the common idea was in urban thinking in Spain in the 1920's and 30's. It is necessary to point out that the meeting between Rubió i Tudurí, from Barcelona, Bastida, from Bilbao, and Fernández, Balbuena, and Lacasa, from Madrid, took place at the Conference of Urban Planning held in 1926. It was precisely at this Conference that opinions as varied as those of Bastida concerning the need to continue the development of Bilbao, those of Rubió i Tudurí on the territorial politics of Catalonia-City, the regional plan of Aranda for Madrid, and the proposals concerning the Guadalquivir and Heliópolis in Sevilla, were presented. The debate formulated in 1926 focused on a common fact: the growing city and the organization not only of the periphery but also of the territory that depended on the city economically. Activity on new territory meant defining the value of real estate and, parallel to this, a railway network meant it was possible to establish regional planning. The conference was important because it allowed those involved to share their different experiences. It allowed divergent viewpoints to be expressed on a subject that no one really knew how to gauge or measure yet. Regardless of individual cases, the proposals made in 1926 all had in common the need to confront the relation of the surroundings of the big city and the city itself; this was true whether the city was Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid or Valencia. In each case, a particular debate took place over what to do about the peripheral communities of the city as well as how to come up with a plan for the general territory immediately surrounding the

city. This territory was not seen or valued from the perspective of its intrinsic character, but was rather understood solely in terms of the interests and needs of the capital. The idea was not to develop Spain along the lines of English notions of regional planning, but rather to repeat the German experience of the big city, to rationalize and order a space that was understood to be hierarchical and dependant, to plan the capital of the future. Consciously or not, Bastida, Lacasa, Balbuena, and Rubió discussed the dissolution of urban forms, the application to new territory of already existing city regulations, the creation of green spaces that served distinct and different purposes, the politics of transportation... signalling the need to theorize about a new reality. Bastida's proposal for Bilbao was important because it initiated the debate concerning the new urban scale. He focused his criticism of the *ensanche* on the understanding that the orthogonal gridblock would be of little use to the future development of the city. In view, above all, of the economic disparities of the region. As an alternative he suggested the Extension Plan or the Regional Plan (Plan for linking Bilbao with surrounding towns), a double system of circulation that would run along the edges of the river from Galdácano to Santurce and the Arenas. Analyzing the Valle del Nervión—the river—as a fundamental system, as urban axis and metropolitan nerve, he made clear its capacity to articulate and influence the rest of the neighboring territory. He pointed out how the integration of the outer neighborhoods should be brought about by way of transportation links;

by way of tunnels, bridges, entries and exits, traffic lines. He put forth the proposal of creating worker neighborhoods (satellite neighborhoods or garden districts), natural parks, the definition of industrial zones etc. All of these would make sense only if there were a global plan that looked to define the immediate surrounding of the region in a way that could substitute the urban solution given by Alzola in his design of the *ensanche*. This plan would have to employ a system of circulation, of bridges and trains, and define zoning in the new territorial city. Bastida's proposal was very much part of the polemics of the day in Bilbao, what previously had been debated between Consulado del Mar and Señorío de Vizcaya. Essentially it was a debate between those who were in favor of an industrial metropolis and those who favored the idea of isolated rural centers. Conscious of the fact that Basque nationalism held within it these two conflicting views, Bastida did not advocate for an architecture of quaint village-like communities, as did José Posé, as a paradigm for the urban image of the territory of Vizcaya (a style which was repeated in all of the proposals for garden cities of the time). Instead he concerned himself with what he denominated the complete city, and with this vision of large scale urbanism, he made clear at the 1926 conference the need to interrelate transportation and territory. As a consequence, what at the beginning of the century had been nothing more than a reivindication by Alzola with the construction of three railway lines, slowly but surely became the authentic problem of a nationalist council that understood just how much a transportation network should

define the hinterland of Bilbao. Porcel, Llopart, and Rubió i Tudurí agreed with Bastida in the 1926 conference that it was necessary to act urbanistically on a far greater scale than had been done in the *ensanche*, and that it was necessary to think in terms of territorial arrangements. In accordance with Maragall and d'Ors' view of Catalonia City as an illusion of a regionalized economy, Rubió proposed making cities of more than 50,000 inhabitants include in their annual budgets the acquisition of open spaces with the object of creating a green belt around the cities. In this way the consigned amount would be divided between urban acquisitions and acquisitions of surrounding territory. In proposing to create a system of urban parks that would serve as a point of departure for reflection on the nature of the territory, the need to understand the city in relation to its surroundings was highlighted: The insistent application of the classical concept of urbanization has erased the frontier that until recently determined urbanist activity. That is, in terms of space, it has ended on the edges of suburbia, and in terms of time, it has limited itself to forseeing the growth of the large city. Such limits and predictions are totally inadequate from the point of view of experience. The error of dealing with the large city as though it were an isolated entity, as if it were unrelated to all its surroundings, has been recognized. The large city does not end where the street ends or for that matter, in a suburban park: much farther out, away in the countryside, the large city casts an influence that must be regulated, both for the

benefit of the city's continued development and for the benefit of the countryside, for that of agriculture, and for that of the rural industries and of all the activities that take place in the country that surrounds the city. This vision of how a large city should be in relation to the land or territory in which it is situated, constitutes what the English urbanists call Regional Planning, that is, regional or territorial urbanization. The objective of this note is not to examine this modern formula, well known to the members of this congress. It is rather a matter of recommending it to the Public Authorities (the City and Regional Councils) as a criteria for understanding urbanism and the development of large cities, and with this aim in mind a national conference is proposed to study its possible application." To abandon the plan for the *ensanche* defined by Cerdà and take up Jausse's proposal to link up Barcelona with its surrounding towns, establishing the growth of the city towards the south, made sense: the Mancomunitat (Regional Government) had rejected the plan of the city in 1920 and had defined its own plan as a regional urbanization project. The *ensanche* commission made it clear that Cerdà's plan had not taken into account the fact that an industrial city had to have worker communities. And given that what characterised these worker communities were streets with a different width (for their lower cost of maintenance and lighting), the plan's mistake was to propose an identical type of city for the bourgeoisie and the working class. In consequence, the need to build worker communities meant that it was likewise necessary to establish a rapid

and economical means of transportation between the periphery and the center, and not only surface transportation but also underground transit was proposed as a solution. With this in mind, it was proposed to lengthen the Gran Vía all the way to Hospitalet (looking for a link up with the roads from el Prat, la Bordeta, Mingo, and el Masó), establish the Sant Andreu and Sant Adrià del Besòs districts; lengthen the Passeig de l'Aduana to the park; construct a viaduct above the railway, and from there, thanks to a system of trams, reach the districts of El Clot and Sant Martí. Finally, continuing the Gran Vía and the Diagonal until the banks of the Besòs meant new space would be available to build a large worker quarter near Barcelona. In Rubió's thinking there was a contradiction, in respect to Bastida's project, that was not debated at the time: territorial urbanization did not necessarily mean regional urbanization; it could also refer to a county project, that is, of a smaller scale. Where the Vizcayan project was defined on a county scale, Rubió was able to envision, with the background experience of the Mancomunitat (the Catalan Regional Government at the time), a project on a larger scale thus defining the concept of region or country. Bastida understood transportation as a means to connect distinct urban centers with the

industrial city. The Catalan proposal went further and advocated for a policy over the whole administrative territory of the Mancomunitat. In Madrid the situation was different: with Arturo Soria's failed venture and in open discussion over how to deal with the chaos on the city's outskirts, the idea of organizing Madrid as capital of a new political space in the same way as Bilbao was not considered. Nor was it considered to act upon an entire territory as was being done in Catalonia. Madrid's problem as a large city was understood in terms of how it would be possible to solve the lack of building ground for the *ensanche*, as a hygienic solution to a social need. The debate had long been focused on the suitability of building garden cities for workers, in making possible the construction of single family housing for worker cooperatives. Putting aside the influence of Soria's proposal for the construction of a beltway railway that would unite the communities near Madrid, a regional plan was presented in 1923, signed by Salaberry, Aranda, Lorite, and García Cascales, in which, for the first time in Madrid, the shortage of housing was analyzed from the double perspective of transportation and territory. If Castro was censured for rigidly applying the orthogonal gridblock to an unsuitable terrain, Núñez Granes, in his proposal for the outskirts, was

criticized for two facts: first, for repeating the orthogonal gridblock of the Ensanche on the periphery; and secondly, because the proposed plan of roads would create a new perimeter which disregarded the reality of a Madrid that wished to grow towards the north (thereby merging with Fuencarral, Chamartín, and Ciudad Lineal) and towards the south (Vallecas and Carabanchel). Above all, though, the plan was censured for not defining where the industrial zone should be located. For these reasons, the project presented in 1923 included: the areas surrounding the city, a definition of the satellite centers and an outline of transportation network. They understood, as did Amós Salvador, that trying to solve the housing shortage by creating garden cities or worker communities was to misunderstand the problem. First it was necessary to understand the territory in terms of the different needs of the city, and consequently, make clear which projects were of an urban scale and which of a regional one. On an urban scale, they made a division between the residential north and the industrial south, placing in these centers the worker communities, satellite cities, and industrial zones. On a regional scale, they proposed using the idea of spatial specialization, organizing satellite cities as far away as 20

kilometers from Madrid, given that "the present speed of transportation permits this" and citing the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909, expressed for the first time the need to substitute the idea of the extension plan for the new concept of regional planning. From this moment onward, the projects for Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid, and Valencia were viewed in terms of territory. What at first had been nothing more than the need to put order on the land (understood as real estate) near large cities, with the aim of creating affordable housing, little by little evolved into the regional plan, and perhaps even a national one, as set forth by Rubió (for Catalonia, in the conference of 1932), or Fonseca or Cort in their formulation of a national plan for urbanism. And what in the beginning had been merely a definition of a railway belt little by little evolved into the desire to establish a new policy of transportation, coherent with the new concept of urbanism. In the 1930's, numerous proposals of regional plans were made for Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and Vizcaya, as were proposals for the colonization or ordering of hydrographic confederations. All of this was the product of that first reflection on the nature of territory, made in 1926 in a simultaneous and parallel manner in different places.